

Waiting to be part of a family

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The waiting, 12-year-old Arius said, is the hardest part.

Arius, exceptionally bright and pressing ahead with plans to be a medical doctor, has waited four years.

"It's hard," Arius said in an interview at the state Capitol on Tuesday. "I pray every night before I go to bed."

Arius, just like hundreds of other children in Michigan's foster care system, prays that time won't run out and that someday someone will make him a permanent part of their family. A new effort to find loving and nurturing homes for Arius and about 300 other older foster children was launched Tuesday with the help of 46 photojournalists, including two from the Detroit Free Press.

"Amazingly, there are parents out there who love parenting older children," said Jean Hoffman, a retired state adoptions manager who now volunteers for the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE).

MARE, with the help of private donations and the volunteer services of the photojournalists, is sponsoring the Michigan Heart Gallery, a collection of vibrant portraits of 62 children who are available for adoption. The idea is to showcase adoptable children in artistic and compelling photographs officials hope will touch the hearts of people who could give them decent homes.

The exhibit was previewed at the state capitol Tuesday, will officially open Saturday at the Michigan Library and Historical Center in Lansing, and will run through Dec. 1. After that, the photographic exhibit travels to Grand Rapids, Detroit, Flint, Saginaw and other cities yet to be scheduled.

Some 4,000 children in Michigan's foster care system are available for adoption after Family Court judges terminated parental rights because of abuse, neglect or abandonment. The majority of those children have relatives, foster parents or others who are willing to adopt them. But about 300 need extra help finding permanent homes through MARE.

Kenyon Kopp, MARE's tracking coordinator who previously was a photojournalist in Wisconsin and Missouri, sent an e-mail last spring to



James, 11, left, and Anthony, 11, both of Christ Child House, look at pictures of children Tuesday who are legally free for adoption at the Heart Gallery opening in the state Capitol in Lansing. The idea of the gallery is to touch the hearts of people so that they open their homes to the children. (Photos by KATHLEEN GALLIGAN/Detroit Free Press)

For more information

To visit foster kids

Photographs of the kids soon will be posted at www.miheart.org, which now has information about the Heart Gallery as well as links to other Web sites featuring adoptable kids. There is also a gallery of nearly 300 adoptable children, including videos at www.mare.org.

To adopt

Visit www.mare.org for

journalists who belong to the Michigan Press Photographers Association, inviting them to participate.

more information on how to adopt the children.

Volunteers, including Free Press photographers Richard Lee and Kathleen Galligan, joined the effort and their work is in the exhibit.

If you go

"We've got some terrific photographers in Michigan who have taken these pictures of children knowing that the only thing they're going to get out of it is a photo credit and the knowledge that they're doing something good," Kopp said.

The traveling exhibit is scheduled:

But the real stars of the exhibit are the kids. About two dozen attended the preview. Arius, who lives at Christ Child House, a residential facility in Detroit for boys who are difficult to place in foster homes, said he shares a room with two other boys. He's seen several of his friends chosen for adoption.

Dec. 3 to Jan. 9 at the Impression Five Science Museum in Lansing

"Sometimes I really don't want to say good-bye to them, but I do," Arius said. "They were with me for a couple of months or a couple of years and then they leave."

Jan. 10 through Feb. 10 at the Celebration Cinema in Grand Rapids

When they leave, the eighth-grader who gets A's and B's and likes science and math best, says he feels "sad and angry."

Feb. 11 through March 11, at the main branch of the Detroit Public Library

But Arius, who will turn 13 soon, is hopeful. He has met someone who might want to adopt him through MARE.

March 12 through April 5 at the Flint Public Library

"Maybe I might get adopted by a lady named Susan."

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